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ABSTRACT

Community colleges are uniquely positioned and well suited to assist in meeting the increasing demand for child care programs. Although a number of colleges have been reluctant to institute these programs due to the problems of liability, operating expenses, and allegations of child abuse, there are a number of advantages to having on-campus child care programs. Child care programs can serve as laboratories for day care training, child development, psychology, and early childhood/elementary education programs, and as prototypes for community child care centers. They can also enhance community relations, increase the enrollment of parents, and, if well run, turn tidy profits by charging competitive fees on a sliding scale. After a college decides to offer child care services, important decisions need to be made about staffing, training, licensure, and employment of work study students and community volunteers. The components of a successful on-campus child care program include: (1) quality care; (2) infant sensory programs, including a daily sensory stimulation and physical exercise schedule for each child; (3) programs for school-age children, including stimulating free-time activities, quiet study areas, and summer day camps; and (4) specialized programs for exceptional children. In addition to serving as a laboratory for Early Childhood Education and certification programs, the campus child care center can also be the nucleus for a variety of continuing education activities for the community. (JMC)

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Central Florida Community College

COMPONENTS OF QUALITY COMMUNITY COLLEGE CHILD CARE PROGRAMS

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COMPONENTS OF QUALITY COMMUNITY COLLEGE CHILD CARE PROGRAMS

There exists a rapidly increasing demand for child care programs as more and more mothers must join the work force. By the year 1995, two-thirds of all preschool children and four out of five school age children will be placed in child care centers as mothers seek employment. The need for quality care will continue to grow, as will parental concern for the welfare of their children.

The community colleges of this country are uniquely positioned and well suited to assist with this key and pivotal issue of child care. The community colleges of America (possibly more than any other institutions) can and frequently do offer training required for licensure to individuals who seek employment in existing day care centers. Because a fundamental requirement for quality training is a laboratory setting that is an actual child care center, more and more community colleges now have such facilities on their campuses.

The community college laboratory child care facility can and should serve as a model program for students who are studying Child Development, and provide a prototype for other such centers in the community. The college laboratory preschool/child care center can and should have a positive impact on the entire child care industry, as child care centers in the community strive to provide improved quality for children.

On-campus quality child care services can result in increased enrollment for community colleges. Parents have the opportunity to visit their children, have lunch with them, and observe their progress, confident that they are in good hands while they work or take classes.

College administrators and the public relations department have an opportunity to showcase the community college through the child care center. Children gain attention and consequently the college receives recognition that may not otherwise be enjoyed. Providing programs for children projects a positive image to the public and certainly enhances public relations. In many cases, quality child care centers tie the college and the community more closely together.

The laboratory child care center can serve as a learning facility for college students who are studying child development, psychology, early childhood and elementary education. Students have the advantage of learning firsthand the theories and ideas they are studying. In such fields of study, there is no substitute for the "hands-on" approach to learning.

While there is public awareness of the need for quality child care centers on community college campuses, a number of colleges have been reluctant to attempt such an undertaking due to highly publicized national problems. Liability, operating expenses, and

alleged child abuse are but a few of the concerns. Although these issues are legitimate considerations, advantages from a planned quality program certainly exceed any disadvantages.

1) Liability problems can be overcome by providing accidental insurance coverage at a cost of approximately $6 per child. A portion of the child care center entrance fee can be set aside to absorb this cost.

2) To offset some of the operating expenses, government funding is available to reimburse the center for food expenses and fees for children of low income families.

3) Child abuse is prevalent in our country; however, a quality program with trained and screened personnel will encounter few problems if an extensive background investigation is conducted on each new employee and qualified, loving child care workers are sought.

In order to provide total and complete financial aid packages, child care must be one such component. Whenever a child care facility exists on a college campus, this financial aid component is readily available. Without an on-campus facility, a college usually experiences difficulty in providing child care for students, even though federal and state assistance for dependent child care for college students is quite readily available. In

addition to children of currently enrolled students, the dependent children of the college faculty and staff as well as children from the general public also need quality child care programs.

College administrators mindful of balancing the budget are quick to point out the financial liabilities of campus day care centers. Actually, quite the opposite is the case. Well run campus day care facilities turn tidy profits for their institutions and still become models for both private and corporate facilities to emulate. With a steering committee composed of child care center directors from both the private and corporate sector, both competition and jealousy dissipate, and the college facility becomes the laboratory example for other day care centers in the community.

Administrators must decide what to charge for these day care services and, in so doing, must ensure that the charges reflect "fair market value" while competing with area facilities. Some very successful day care centers have addressed the matter of fees and competitiveness by establishing rates slightly greater than those charged by neighboring private facilities. A majority of parents (faculty members are no exception) want the best for their children and are quite willing to pay for top-notch day care, while state and federal programs often provide the financial assistance necessary for children of needy students. The steering committee of area day care center directors will provide much help

and assistance in establishing an adequate fee structure.

The fee structure will vary depending upon the economy in the various communities. A sliding fee scale based on parental income is one option when considering a fair child care fee plan and assisting low income parents; however, a balance of children from low, middle, and high income families must be maintained in order to meet operating expenses.

Staffing the child care center requires careful consideration. Although a number of states have educational requirements for child care personnel, they are usually minimal. The community college must set the standards in the community for selecting quality child care personnel. Hiring a director with a Master's Degree in Early Childhood Education is desirable for he/she is most crucial to the operation of a quality center. A two year degree in child care center management, or at least a one year certificate in child care or its equivalent is desirable when selecting qualified child care workers/teachers. Adequate training will provide an individual with the necessary knowledge and skill to perform the rigorous duties of manager, preschool teacher, and curriculum coordinator. Without competence in the area of child development, positive guidance techniques, preschool curriculum, nutrition, health, and safety, an employee can do little more than baby-sit. The days of providing custodial care are obsolete. The community has become acutely aware of the need

to offer children a well rounded program to provide emotional, social, intellectual, and physical development.

A background check of potential employees is an important tool for eliminating employment of undesirable individuals. This should include the investigation of references, examination of the child abuse registry and criminal records, and information from previous employers, to insure that the potential employee has the personality, skill, and temperament to effectively work with children.

Community college child care centers can choose exemption from licensure in some states due to their established status as an educational institution. But the community college should elect to undergo the licensing procedure to ensure quality and to serve as a model for the community. Licensed child care programs must meet certain standards that include teacher/child ratios, health and safety practices, appropriate materials and activities for children, teacher qualifications and certificate updating, square-feet per child, and maximum enrollment permitted. There may be special requirements for the physical facility, such as the number of toilets and sinks, fences for playgrounds, enrollment forms containing information as to who is permitted to pick up the child, and emergency procedures to follow (including permission for hospital treatment). Though some licensing requirements are minimal, adherence to the state requirements is a good training

experience for staff and students observing/working in the lab school. Quality can only increase with a state licensed facility. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (N.A.E.Y.C.) offers a national Early Childhood license to those centers having quality facilities and workers. Their standards are more stringent than most state standards.

To offset some of the payroll expenses, student assistants from the financial aid work study program can assist the qualified teachers as part time aides. In addition, students from various disciplines can be assigned to observe children and present activities to them, and carry out student teaching assignments and practicum requirements. Additional student help can eliminate the need to hire aides and other assistants.

A volunteer program utilizing high school students and senior citizens can lend added support to the child care laboratory. Volunteers can receive a certificate of attendance in child development while learning firsthand early childhood practices. Youthful volunteers receive an introduction to the profession and provide the college program with prospective future students.

Our nation currently faces several issues that are of great concern to Early Childhood advocates, and are components of a successful campus day care facility:

1) **Quality care**: This ranks high as a major concern due to a shortage of child care programs and providers' lack of knowledge concerning children's needs and development. Unfortunately, the cost of a day care center frequently parallels the quality of the care found there.

2) **Infant sensory programs**: These programs are in demand because child care centers often exclude this age group from their services. Parents with infants are frequently the ones who need day care the most, and in turn experience the most difficulty in finding these services.

3) **School age children**: The growing number of school age children left at home after school, during the summer, and on school in-service days without supervision is great cause for concern. Consequently, in an effort to assist in offsetting child care expenses and provide quality programs for these children, federal and state funds are now available.

4) **Exceptional children**: Procuring adequate care to meet the special needs of these children is increasingly difficult. Even though the increasing need for child care in this area is obvious, traditional day care centers are not likely to provide assistance in this area.

A good Early Childhood curriculum in any child care center will enhance the quality of the program for ages one through five. The days of simply "baby-sitting" the children have long since passed. A well rounded preschool program should offer appropriate

learning activities that encourage children to develop socially, emotionally, physically, and intellectually. Varied activities encourage a child to make choices and promote a preschooler's independence, while concrete (tangible) objects and learning experiences encourage the young child to participate in activities and retain information. In addition, a quality program should include activities in science, social studies, pre-math, language development, small and large muscle development, art and music. Creative expression is enhanced through movement and art.

A quality infant program should include a daily sensory stimulation schedule for each child. Appropriate activities should be presented according to each child's stage of development. The program should offer physical exercises that help each infant develop to his/her potential; i.e. exercises for arms and legs to prepare a child for pulling up, crawling, and walking. Eye coordination activities may include eye movement games and visual stimulation materials (brightly colored scarves, visual patterns, etc.). Sensory stimulation touching activities; i.e., jello/noodle play, and a texture box, are an essential part of a stimulation program. A variety of sounds may be presented to the infants through musical instruments and records. Language development begins at birth and should be reinforced with books, songs, and labeling games. Because many day care facilities exclude infants, this age group is particularly necessary for the campus facility.

As a result of the rising child care costs, federal Title XX funds are now available to qualified child care centers in an effort to assist low income parents. Those who meet the qualifications pay little or no fees, based upon individual income. The child care center is in turn reimbursed for 92% of tuition and fees through local, state and federal funds, while providing a local match of 8% in the form of a physical facility or funds from an outside source.

To offset food expenses, a Child Care Food Program grant is available to child care centers having a non-profit tax exempt status [IRS 501(c)(3)] or maintaining a Title XX enrollment of at least 25% of the total child care center enrollment. Reimbursement funds are available through the United States Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Services and are transmitted to the center monthly. This funding aids in offsetting total expenses and allows funds to be allocated to other areas in order to enhance the quality care that a program can offer.

Latch-key children are becoming more prevalent in our society due to a lack of affordable programs that provide appropriate school age activities. Ideally, child care centers should provide separate areas for school age children to avoid "pre-school" treatment and subsequent loss of self esteem. In addition, a variety of stimulating activities can be made available; i.e., board games, cards, arts, and crafts, outdoor free play, jump

rope, hop scotch, and ball games are appropriate activities. School age children are ready for free time, having had a full day of structure. A quiet area to enable a child to complete homework assignments is beneficial. Fees for such a program can be implemented on a sliding scale to assist low income parents.

A summer day camp program can help to address the problem of children staying home alone and unattended during the summer vacation. Such a program should include a variety of activities to encourage school age children to participate in both sports (softball, racquetball, volleyball, and swimming lessons) and quiet activities (board games, arts and crafts, books and videos) which provide balance. Computers challenge the school age child and contribute to his/her intellectual development. Field trips to zoos, museums, and other interesting locations complement the total program. In addition, child care centers can offer much needed programs to care for school age children during public school closings, special holidays, and teacher in-service days. The critical need for such programs is frequently overlooked and often simply not available.

Special needs children are usually excluded from typical child care programs because of the extra and unique attention they require. The adult/child ratio becomes much lower and the center requires additional staff with special training for these exceptional children. Also, specialized equipment is often required.

The federal government has addressed this problem by offering grants that will enable Early Childhood programs to include special needs children. Grants are available under the Education of the Handicapped Act and include the following: Handicapped Children's Early Education Program; Grants to states for the Education of Handicapped Children; Preschool Grants Program; Handicapped Services for Deaf-Blind Children; and Youth and Training Personnel to educate the handicapped.

The community college is in a position to offer area residents a variety of programs in Early Childhood education. Because individuals vary in capabilities and needs, a wide selection of child education programs must be made available. An A.S. or A.A. Degree in child care center management will provide a well rounded program for those who desire to work as child care administrators, preschool teachers, or curriculum coordinators. Both the degree and certificate programs should include courses in Discipline Guidance, Observing and Recording Behavior, Day Care Administration, Child Development, Infant Stimulation, Preschool Curriculum, Practicum Experiences, and required care courses. The CDA (Child Development Associate) credential is a nationally known credential that is designed to train individuals who are currently employed in the child care field. An individual is given work experience credit and combines college courses with "on the job" experience. The student prepares a portfolio that focuses on thirteen competency areas. Upon completion of this program, a

national team of Early Childhood Educators evaluate the candidate on the job and examine the portfolio.

The community college can also include the individual state's child care requirements for certification in the various Early Childhood programs. Upon completion of a program, the student receives state certification in addition to receiving a degree or certificate. The advantages to such dual accreditations are very obvious to all concerned.

The community college child care program can be a nucleus of continuing education for the community. The rapidly growing child care industry requires continuing education programs to keep staff updated on current trends in guiding and working with young children, legislation, and theoretical/philosophical changes in Early Childhood Education. Not only can the employee update his knowledge, but renew his/her child care certification through attending Early Childhood conferences.

Professional Early Childhood conferences can be offered to the community by the college on an annual basis. The use of nationally known child experts can be a drawing card for community attendance. A seminar of such magnitude should provide a variety of theoretical and hands-on workshops ranging in topics from 'Make N Take' to the latest positive guidance approaches. Including a luncheon with a featured speaker not only offers additional

information, but also permits colleagues to socialize in a more informal setting.

A project of such magnitude should involve input from community agencies, i.e., county school board, local professional associations, and the child care licensing agency. Other related agencies could include HRS and pre-K councils, etc. The cooperative effort from a group of child care advocates can certainly produce a top quality conference that will offer community child care workers and managers, public school teachers, and parents continuing education credits. Teacher certification points and renewed child care certificates are real incentives for organizing a professional conference. But the chief benefit comes in seeing improved quality in preschool and public school programs.

Other continuing education programs for the community can include national teleconferences on subjects such as corporate child care, child abuse, and day care dilemma. The teleconference can be followed up by a local panel discussion from experts in the community. Panel members can include a child expert, day care manager, local legislator, child abuse agent, and day care licensing agent. The community can participate in questions and answers and become a vital part of the panel discussion.

Mini workshops on a smaller scale can provide persons in the Child Development field with updated information and continuing

education points. Topics for mini conferences can include CPR and First Aid Training, holiday ideas, child abuse, and special education for exceptional children. Many people prefer the small size and usually more informal structure provided by the workshop setting. As a result, comprehensive, community based child care programs will include these workshops as one component of the total program.

S U M M A R Y

The community college can offer a total package of quality Early Childhood programs that serve as a model for the community. As a frontrunner in Early Childhood Education, the college should offer:

1) an on-site laboratory preschool program
2) educational programs in Early Childhood Education
3) a degree and certificate program
4) continuing education programs and conferences
5) programs for school age children
6) programs for special needs children.

Because child care is near the top of the Congressional agenda, the state legislatures' agenda, corporate agendas, and the personal agendas of young families and single parents, the whole issue of community college day care centers will be one that can only grow larger. Institutions currently offering day care

services will continue to be trendsetters and will benefit both students and the community, as will colleges just entering the child care arena. For those schools who simply ignore these ever increasing demands and do nothing, the pressures to provide such facilities can only increase.

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